UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1997/65
11 June 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1997
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 1997
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. As the Economic and Social Council undertakes its assessment of the implementation of the policy directives decided upon at the triennial policy review of operational activities for development in 1995, two basic considerations need to be kept in view.

2. First, the operational activities for development undertaken through the United Nations system continue to play a unique and critical role in supporting developing countries to manage their own development process. The neutrality of multilateral development cooperation and its capacity to respond flexibly to the needs of developing countries are perceived as a distinct and major asset by developing countries. Even as requirements change and new programme needs are defined, operational activities remain a key ingredient in the development process, although they must continue to evolve in scope and coverage.

3. Second, reform of operational activities is a continuous process: it has been given renewed impetus by the policy directives established by the General Assembly (in its resolutions 47/199 and 50/120) in the context of the triennial policy reviews of 1992 and 1995. A central objective is the reform of country-level cooperation for development. The aim is to achieve greater coherence in responding to national priorities in all developing countries, involving (a) further strengthening of the resident coordinator system; (b) increased efficiency and effectiveness through common premises and shared services; and (c) adaptation of the profile of the field establishment to the programme needs and priorities at the country level.

4. Operational activities are thus undergoing a process of transformation. The direction and intensity of that transformation will have an important bearing on the contribution that those activities make to sustained economic growth and sustainable development of developing countries.

5. The present report on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120, which has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 54 of that resolution and paragraph 11 of Council resolution 1996/42, should be considered within the context outlined above. It identifies issues for the 1998 triennial policy review that should be part of the comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Assembly resolution 50/120. The Council may wish to consider issues that will require particular attention; by providing its guidance, the Council will help to focus the preparation of the comprehensive review in 1998.

6. The present report focuses on capacity-building, field-level and regional-level coordination, and resources - the topics chosen by the Council for consideration at its substantive session of 1997 (see Council resolution 1996/42, para. 12). In addressing those topics, the report also provides an assessment and recommendations on related subjects within the ambit of the resident coordinator system (country strategy note, programme approach, national execution, harmonization of cycles, common premises and shared services, simplification and harmonization of procedures etc.). The report is divided into the present main document, containing key conclusions and recommendations;

three addenda on resources (E/1997/65/Add.1), field and regional coordination (E/1997/65/Add.2) and capacity-building (E/1997/65/Add.3); and a statistical addendum (E/1997/65/Add.4).

Capacity-building

7. Issues related to capacity-building (see sect. I below) are reviewed in order to follow up the Assembly's decisions to promote a common understanding of the concept within the context of the current and prospective requirements of developing countries. The aim is to inform the Council of the current state of thinking within the system. Action to achieve a common understanding of the concept and ensure that capacity-building can be sustained will be pursued at various levels, including within the framework of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Moreover, impact evaluations under way pursuant to paragraph 56 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (see sect. IV below) will focus on capacity-building.

Resources

8. The assessment of and recommendations concerning resources (see sect. II below) focus on the specific areas defined in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/42, which also alludes to annex 1 of General Assembly resolution 50/227. Special attention is thus paid to providing an up-to-date analysis of issues and trends in core and non-core resources, as well as suggestions on how core resources might be increased and made more predictable. In considering that matter, the Council may also wish to take into account previous reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/48/940 and A/49/834), as called for in paragraph 9 of the annex to Assembly resolution 50/227.

Field and regional coordination

9. As the present report shows (see sect. III below), Assembly resolution 50/120 and its predecessor Assembly resolution 47/199 both continue to receive priority attention at the level of the United Nations system through CCPOQ, United Nations funds and programmes through the Executive Committee on Development Operations[1] recently established by the Secretary-General and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), and by individual organizations. In relation to the targets established in the management process established last year and communicated to the Council in document E/1996/64, annex II, progress is being made on a broad front, although much remains to be done. For example, the United Nations system recently reviewed its experience in the functioning of the resident coordinator system, with a view to identifying best practices for future guidance regarding the country strategy note, the programme approach and national execution and administrative management; the results of that review will be used to prepare guidelines agreed system-wide, as provided for by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/120.

I. CAPACITY-BUILDING: SOME OPERATIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES[2]

10. Capacity-building is an issue that is at the forefront of the global development agenda. It is indispensable not only for attaining national self-reliance and sustained economic growth but also for achieving globally agreed goals. The decision taken by the General Assembly in paragraphs 22 and 27 of its resolution 50/120 on capacity-building reflects the enhanced importance of the subject. The Assembly decided that (a) capacity-building should remain an essential part of the United Nations system operational activities; (b) those activities should be integrated into and should support national effort; and (c) the United Nations system should continue to work on promoting a common understanding and operationalization of the concept, including its sustainability. The Assembly invited the Economic and Social Council to consider capacity-building as one of the three focus areas at its substantive session in 1997.

11. The record of technical cooperation devoted to capacity-building, although impressive, remains inadequate. Although such cooperation is a significant part of the global effort to liberate millions of people from poverty, 1.5 billion people are still without the basic necessities of human well-being. The number of least developed countries has increased from 24 in 1970 to 48 in 1996. Doubts have also been expressed about the relevance and sustainability of some capacities built through technical cooperation, and there is concern that some activities have even had negative effects on long-term capacity-building and have aggravated dependency. Too much emphasis may have been placed on immediate economic outputs through manufacturing, equipment and experts, and too little on the policy framework and on social, cultural and environmental questions. A concern for expenditure delivery and donor accountability has perhaps not been matched by adequate attention to beneficiaries, integration, local ownership and local capacities.

12. To succeed, development cooperation for capacity-building must be based on "partnership" approaches. In paragraph 22 of its resolution 50/120, the General Assembly decided that the objective of capacity-building, as an essential part of operational activities for development, should aim to integrate such activities and provide support for strengthening national capacities in policy and programme formulation, development management, planning, implementation coordination, monitoring and review. Moreover, the major donors stated in 1995 that the role of external partners is to help strengthen capacities in developing partner countries, and that the dominant conception of the mission of development assistance is to help countries and societies to strengthen their economic, human, social and institutional capacities for self-sustaining development. As discussed in more detail in document E/1997/65/Add.3, the evolution of technical cooperation and the changed global setting require new approaches and are reinforcing the imperative of establishing home-grown capacities. Strengthened capacities within all segments of society are increasingly seen as the key to breaking the vicious cycle of mass poverty, population explosion, environmental degradation, slow rates of economic growth and political instability. The heart of capacity-building is the empowerment of individuals and societies to make and carry out informed choices and to liberate the creative energies, particularly of hitherto marginalized sectors. A vision of development and of the kind of society to be sustained is essential.

13. Capacity-building is a prerequisite for and is indispensable to long-term development, and it requires specific priority attention. National capacity-building is critical to effective international economic cooperation; yet, its reach and rationale go beyond external aid effectiveness. It is a bridge between potential and performance and a link between domestic processes and development aid. Institution-building is crucial to the extent that it leads to the empowerment of people and the creation of a framework to help them to contribute to the development process. It is country-driven and situation-specific, and is best undertaken for well-defined development issues and within a programmatic approach.

14. The entry points of external assistance into capacity-building require rethinking. The comparative advantages of the United Nations development system are well suited for capacity-building. Growing economic integration and interlinkages among issues suggest the need for new and more comprehensive approaches to capacity-building adapted to the constantly evolving needs of developing countries. Some of the issues reviewed in document E/1997/65/Add.3 are sustainability; trade; technology; human migration; humanitarian emergencies; peace-building; aid optimization; governance, including State and civil society; economic reforms; and South-South cooperation. None of them are new, nor are all germane to every country; capacities to cope with them must be consciously developed and integrated into the mainstream of capacity-building. Some approaches created along the road to progress outlive their usefulness and have to be discarded.

15. A key challenge is how to reorient traditional approaches to capacity-building to meet the new and changing requirements of recipient countries. The organizations of the United Nations system have considerable experience in the design and implementation of programmes for capacity-building.. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the United Nations development system have introduced new guidelines and new modalities. Recent United Nations conferences, particularly the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), have focused on the essential contributions that capacity-building will play in their follow-up. Decisions of the General Assembly concerning the setting of the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities, such as the country strategy note, the programme approach and national execution, are providing important new support.

16. The United Nations system can serve as a true pacesetter and catalyst in international development cooperation and in responding to national needs. Not only programming processes but also the presence and skill profile of the United Nations system at the country level require review. That cannot be expected to solely emerge from the field; the headquarters of United Nations system organizations and bodies must lead a systemic transformation and introduce attitudinal changes to increase effectiveness in focusing on the central problems of the countries concerned. To be effective and enduring, a strong political push is needed. The 1998 triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations system provides the forum and opportunity. Meanwhile, a two-pronged approach is being pursued: to continue to refine concepts and ideas; and to undertake in-depth impact studies in

selected countries, not only to assess current work but also to test emerging ideas in specific situations in countries. The results will be reported to the General Assembly.

Recommendation 1

17. The Council may wish to consider the five recommendations contained in document E/1997/65/Add.3, paragraphs 41, 43, 47, 49 and 52. In addition, the Council may wish to reaffirm that the United Nations system should continue to pursue and develop a common understanding of capacity-building. In so doing, it should take into account experience acquired to date and the new and emerging requirements of developing countries, for consideration in the context of the 1998 triennial comprehensive policy review. It is intended that the changes needed in the areas of capacity-building by the United Nations system will be considered by CCPOQ, and the result will be included in the Secretary-General's report on the triennial policy review.

II. TRENDS IN CORE AND NON-CORE RESOURCES[3]

A. Background

18. The need to increase resources to meet the growing needs of recipient countries and to make the funding system more predictable has been a continuing concern of the General Assembly. They are an essential consideration in the overall reform process of the United Nations development system. As far back as 1977, the General Assembly, in its resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, called for a real increase in the flow of resources for such activities on a predictable, continuous and assured basis. Several resolutions address the three related areas of governance, funding and efficiency and the impact of operational activities for development, including in the context of several triennial policy reviews, which commenced in 1980.

19. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/42, strongly reaffirmed that the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the operational activities of the United Nations system must be enhanced by, inter alia, a substantial increase in their funding and through the full implementation of General Assembly resolutions 47/199, 48/162, 50/120 and 50/227. The Council requested the Secretary-General to include in his progress report on the implementation of resolution 50/120 an analytical assessment of the implications for operational activities for development of the recent trends in core and non-core resources, and to make a recommendation on how to increase core resources and effectively implement section 1 of General Assembly resolution 50/227. The present section has been prepared in response to that request. It takes into account the legislative history, including the fact that previous reports on the subject have yet to be considered in depth by the Council and the Assembly.

B. Core resources

20. The United Nations funds and programmes - UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNFPA - are the principal avenues through which the operational activities of the United Nations system are financed. Their resources fall into two broad categories: core and non-core (for terminology, see E/1997/65/Add.1, annex). The combined total resources channelled through the funds and programmes in 1994, 1995 and 1996 are estimated at US$ 4.5 billion, US$ 4.3 billion and US$ 4.5 billion, respectively.

21. Of total resources, core funds in 1996 constituted 55 per cent in UNDP, 58 per cent in UNICEF, 82 per cent in UNFPA and 54 per cent in WFP. The stagnation of some funding and the steady decline of other core funding have inhibited the capacity of United Nations funds and programmes to play the roles assigned to them and to respond effectively to national needs while maintaining their universal and multilateral character. United Nations funds and programmes are following three approaches to enhance core funding: (a) enhancing efficiency and transparency of their operations; (b) seeking a larger share from existing traditional sources; and (c) developing new sources of funding.

22. Their core resources are focused and prioritized towards low-income countries. Although the reluctance of some traditional countries to enhance core funding is part of a broader picture of stagnant or declining official development assistance (ODA) in a constrained fiscal environment, their apparent preference for special-purpose and trust funds also reflects concern by Governments about the manner in which core resources are allocated: attempts to increase core resources need to address those concerns.

23. Not only are core funds stagnant but they are also excessively dependent (close to 90 per cent) on as few as 15 countries (for details see E/1997/65/Add.1). Ways of expanding the resource base through better burden-sharing among donors remain to be addressed. At the same time, the traditional donor base has remained static despite significant changes in the dynamics of the growth poles of the global economy. The economic strength of some developing countries could enable them to contribute at a higher level. Developing countries contribute over 75 per cent of cost-sharing funds, meant for use in their own countries. How to encourage those who are in a position to do so to "graduate" from recipient to donor status requires further attention.

Recommendation 2

24. The core resource base, dependent on less than 10 per cent of United Nations Member States for over 90 per cent of its value, needs to be broadened. To that end, the potential of additional sources of funding for core resources might be explored further, including possible concerns of Governments concerning that source of funding.

25. Non-core funds embrace a wide range of modalities, particularly cost-sharing in the case of UNDP and special-purpose or dedicated funds and supplementary funds in the case of other funds and programmes. Private flows now far exceed official flows, and non-governmental organizations, the private sector and international foundations are actively engaged in a few countries in

areas similar to those on which the United Nations funds and programme are focusing. It is useful to explore the extent to which bridges can be built to private sources; such organizations as UNICEF are already engaged in that task.

Recommendation 3

26. The possibility of attracting more contributions from non-governmental sources in addition to those provided by Governments, including from private international foundations and the private sector, as well as the policy adjustments necessary to permit such a possibility, may need to be reviewed.

27. The emergence of poverty eradication and capacity-building as the overarching goals of development cooperation - bilateral and multilateral - offers an opportunity to enhance core funding at the global level by exploring the possibility of channelling funds from bilateral sources to supplement non-core funding.

C. Public support

28. Voluntary funding has always been a function of political choice. In a period of fiscal constraint and competitive environment, it is also a matter of public support. The good work and best practices of the United Nations development system in the field have to "percolate up" and influence decision-making on funding in a more organized way. Greater attention has to be paid to nurturing, strengthening and networking the beneficiaries of United Nations development system and others who are committed to supporting the multilateral cooperation provided by the United Nations development system. While much of the effort to raise core funds must be undertaken by the system within traditional donor countries and potential new donors, recipient developing countries can also play stronger advocacy roles by mobilizing their political influence, bilateral and multilateral.

Recommendation 4

29. Effective resource mobilization requires stronger political commitment by all countries, including developing countries. Concerns, including about their role in decision-making, may need to be addressed to enable them to play a more active public advocacy role for resource mobilization. Moreover, success stories and best practices of the United Nations development system should be more strategically used to raise resources from both existing and new donors.

Recommendation 5

30. With the convergence of the mission statements of the funds and programmes and their follow-up mandates to United Nations conferences, more coordinated fund-raising may be explored, including in the context of current reforms.

D. Previous reports

31. The consideration of a new funding system has been considered by the General Assembly on the basis of resolution 48/162 of 14 January 1994, and most recently its resolutions 50/120 and 50/227. The Secretary-General had submitted two comprehensive reports to be considered by the open-ended consultations established pursuant to resolution 48/162, containing a number of proposals, including proposals on enhancing core resources. It may be useful to revisit and review those proposals in association with the present proposals.

Recommendation 6

32. The proposals contained in the Secretary-General's earlier reports on funding (A/48/940 and A/49/834), particularly those relating to enhancing core resources, may be reviewed in conjunction with those contained in the present report.

E. Process

33. The General Assembly and other bodies have been seized of the subject of increased, continuous and assured resources, particularly core resources, for a number of years. To date, various consultations on prospective new modalities for financing have been inconclusive.

Recommendation 7

34. Experience gained with the open-ended, informal consultations established by the President of the General Assembly pursuant to resolution 48/162 may be used by Governments to consider the most appropriate process for conducting further consultations on the subject of funding.

III. COUNTRY, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL COORDINATION[4]

A. Country-level coordination

35. Since operational activities are for the benefit of recipient countries, their integration into national development process is of the utmost importance. Although progress is being made in achieving a strengthened resident coordinator system and in managing more effective and coherent United Nations system programmes, much remains to be done to achieve the goals set by the General Assembly. At the centre of current efforts to give practical expression to strengthened cooperation at the country level are the measures outlined by the Secretary-General on 17 March 1997 (see A/51/829). Steps are also being taken in CCPOQ and in other inter-agency forums.

36. In proceeding with the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and the relevant aspects of the Secretary-General's 17 March letter, a set of related measures are being introduced to improve significantly the functioning of the resident coordinator system. Executive heads of the funds and programmes have agreed that the current resident coordinator system, with its funding and

management links to UNDP, requires improvements. They are committed to creating a strong country team under the leadership of the resident coordinator. The steps being taken are supplemented and broadened at the ACC level, through CCPOQ and its working group on the resident coordinator system.

37. The team leadership role of the resident coordinator is being reinforced, inter alia, by updated guidelines, which will cover follow-up to United Nations conferences; implementation of paragraphs 41 and 42 of Assembly resolution 50/120; support to the country strategy note process; preparation of United Nations development assistance frameworks; common databases; common country assessments linked to the development of programmes; and specification of various duties and responsibilities within the context of a team approach and in relation to the programme needs of the host country. The resident coordinator will function on behalf of the whole system, and priority will be given to those functions (UNDP will designate a UNDP programme manager whenever the workload warrants it). The competencies required of the resident coordinator are being redefined to improve the selection process, appraisal of performance and training. Other members of the resident coordinator team will also have more clearly defined responsibilities for making the system work.

38. In considering field coordination, including the assessment provided in addendum 2, the Council may wish to determine whether the functioning of the resident coordinator system is supported by consistent and mutually reinforcing mandates, or whether clarification may be required. In that connection, it is evident that the resident coordinator system is the product of the historical evolution of a complex set of interorganizational arrangements. Building on those arrangements, the functioning of the resident coordinator system needs to be viewed in a more comprehensive manner that takes as a starting point the requirements for the effective and flexible management of the totality of development programmes undertaken in the country with the support of the system, and for optimizing limited resources.

1. Functioning of the resident coordinator system at the country level

39. Country experience shows that there is a trend towards increased participation in the resident coordinator system. Success in the functioning of the resident coordinator system has depended on the capacity and willingness of all members of the United Nations system to work as a country team towards agreed objectives, which requires a management style by all concerned that balances the leadership of the resident coordinator in support of national priorities with appropriate delegation of responsibilities to member organizations according to the lead-agency concept.

2. Role of the resident coordinator

40. The need to enhance the resident coordinator's responsibility and authority for the planning and coordination of programmes is reaffirmed in paragraph 42 of General Assembly resolution 50/120, which provides for the resident coordinator to propose, where required and in full consultation with the Government,

amendments of country programmes and major projects and programmes to the heads of the United Nations organizations in order to bring them into line with the country strategy note. Country missions have revealed that the level of authority envisioned in that provision of the resolution has not yet been fully recognized and operationalized.

3. Field-level committee

41. In most countries, the basic inter-agency consultation mechanism within the resident coordinator system is the periodic meeting among heads of agencies. In their annual reports, resident coordinators have confirmed that field-level committees have been established in 86 out of 107 reporting countries.

42. The General Assembly decided, in paragraph 41 of its resolution 50/120, that the field-level committee should review substantive activities of the United Nations system, including draft country programmes, sectoral programmes and projects, prior to approval by individual organizations, and should be one of the main vehicles for exchanging experience acquired within the United Nations system. Resident coordinators in 46 out of 107 reporting programme countries reported that the field-level committees carry out that review function, although country missions conducted in early 1997 concluded that much further progress is required in that respect. In 61 out of 107 cases, resident coordinators have reported that the field-level committee has enhanced the participation of the various United Nations system organizations in each other's country programming processes, including mid-term reviews, as well as collaboration in needs assessment and situation analysis.

43. There is a perception among field representatives of agencies that the provision in paragraph 41 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 will become fully operational only once it is translated into specific instructions on programming procedures by their own organizations, explicitly requesting the use of the field-level committee for consultation and review of agency-specific programming activities.

Recommendation 8

44. The Council may wish to recommend that all organizations, particularly the funds and programmes, issue instructions and guidelines as part of their programming procedures to give effect to paragraph 42 of General Assembly resolution 50/120.

45. Field representation of United Nations system organizations differs in terms of mandates, structure and professional capacity. Different members of field-level committees are thus bound to respond to the system-wide review function of such committees with varying effectiveness. The workload of country representatives may also be a factor. The full implementation of the review function of the field committee requires that those constraints be overcome and that each member devote enough time and effort to it.

Recommendation 9

46. To give full effect to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 50/120 on field-level committees, the Council may wish to consider requesting the United Nations system to take the necessary measures to establish joint programme and project appraisal committees as an integral part of country-level programme management. The Council may also wish to request the United Nations system organizations and bodies to issue clear instructions to field personnel on their role in the resident coordinator system in general, and in the field-level committees and thematic groups in particular. In order to increase the motivation and the quality of technical inputs, senior field personnel's contribution to the resident coordinator system should be part of their job description.

4. Thematic groups

47. There is evidence of a growing trend to use thematic working groups as a device to promote a more concerted approach to system-wide programming of operational activities. Based on the 1996 reports of the resident coordinators (107 reports as of end April), those groups can be found in at least 84 out of 107 programme countries. However, that does not mean that those groups always play a major role in the functioning of the resident coordinator system: in some countries, their role is limited to inter-agency information exchange or negotiation, and their programme role is marginal. In many other cases, however, thematic groups have led to improvement in system-wide collaboration, especially at the technical level. They also represent a practical way to implement the lead-agency concept, letting individual organizations take charge of specific groups within the resident coordinator system, based on mandate and competency.

Recommendation 10

48. In order to allow thematic working groups to achieve tangible results, the Council may wish to recommend that United Nations system organizations and bodies, in staffing their country offices, take into account the technical professional capacity and resources required to support the work of those groups in relation to the programme requirements of recipient countries.

5. Follow-up to major conferences

49. The Council, at its substantive session of 1995, took note of the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations system, at the ACC level, to promote a coordinated follow-up to major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

50. At the country level, the General Assembly, in paragraph 39 of its resolution 50/120, acknowledged the role of the resident coordinators in facilitating, in full consultation with national Governments, a coherent and coordinated United Nations follow-up to major international conferences at the field level. The combined outputs of global conferences should be reflected

through coordinated integration of United Nations system support into national processes; such coordinated integration, however, has to date been achieved in only a few countries.

6. Information-sharing of planned activities and collaborative programming within the resident coordinator system

51. Information-sharing, including the establishment of a common data bank and common country assessment, is an area in which the resident coordinator system is achieving progress that is increasingly being extended to a range of national entities, both governmental and non-governmental. Information-sharing and consultations are widely pursued on operational and administrative matters, as well as substantive and programme issues. General exchanges of views and ex post facto information sharing, although useful is, however, only part of what is required to bring about effective programme collaboration.

52. Progress in establishing system-wide mechanisms for shared and collaborative operational programming appears to be slower. Although harmonization of programming cycles is an ongoing effort within JCGP, it still does not mean harmonization of programme content.

Recommendation 11

53. The Council may wish to recommend to United Nations system organizations, in particular United Nations funds and programmes, that they ensure that programmes and project ideas are shared at the outset with the resident coordinator, facilitating collaborative programming within an agreed framework, including a resource framework at the country level.

7. Shared and collaborative programming

54. When Governments call on the function of the resident coordinator to facilitate consultations with the donor community, the resident coordinator system can play an important role thanks to the neutrality of the United Nations system and the range of competencies of the system. In some countries, the participation in donor meetings of resident coordinator system members other than the resident coordinator has been limited.

Recommendation 12

55. The Council may wish to recommend that United Nations system organizations and bodies attach greater priority, on the basis of their respective areas of competence, to providing quality and timely support to the resident coordinator system when asked to give support to national coordination of external cooperation, in accordance with the requirements of recipient countries.

8. Administrative aspects of the resident coordinator system: common premises and shared services

56. Paragraph 44 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 requests that JCGP and, to the extent possible, the specialized agencies, make substantial efforts to achieve common premises, on the basis of cost-benefit analyses, while avoiding causing increased burdens for host countries in the process. The Secretary-General, in his letter of 17 March 1997, has reiterated that the drive to establish common premises and common services arrangements at the country level will be intensified. The matter of common premises and shared services should be the object of a thorough evaluation in connection with the preparation of the next triennial policy review.

57. Common services arrangements are in effect in several areas, including security, maintenance, reception, staff services, communication, conference rooms, travel agents, financial and banking services, local transportation.

58. The Secretary-General has underlined that the establishment of common premises and common services serves to encourage a daily habit of cooperation and consultation. Implementation of common services arrangements at the country level may also release resources for programmes.

Recommendation 13

59. The Council may wish to request the United Nations funds and programmes to achieve further progress on common premises and the sharing of administrative services at the country level.

9. Harmonization of rules and procedures

60. In paragraph 45 of its resolution 50/120, the General Assembly calls for further simplification and harmonization of the rules and procedures used by the United Nations development system in its operational activities. In particular, at the country level, sharing of administrative systems and services and the development of common databases is encouraged. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/42, also provided guidance on steps to be taken in that respect. The Secretary-General, in his letter of 17 March 1997, while stressing the need to establish common services arrangements at the country level, indicated that all United Nations funds and programmes will be requested to implement measures to more closely collaborate at the country level in the preparation of programmes and in other areas; that will require a special effort to harmonize programming rules and procedures.

10. Programme approach

61. Despite a considerable effort to introduce the programme approach system-wide, there is still a lack of common operational-level understanding among United Nations system organizations on how best to implement it. Simplification of the programme approach procedures and their harmonization within the system are still needed. Operational guidelines and training on how to use the

programme approach system-wide are under preparation based on experience gained to date.

11. Country strategy note

62. The General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review the guidelines for the formulation of the country strategy note and enhance their operational relevance. There are countries in which the country strategy note formulation has been thorough and successful, and others in which the process is still inadequate. A full review of the state of implementation of the country strategy note will be presented in 1998, in accordance with paragraph 57 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 on the preparation of the 1998 triennial policy review.

63. In countries in which the country strategy note has not produced the expected results or the country strategy note is not expected to be in place soon, there is still need for more work on a consistent response of the United Nations system to the development priorities and policies and plans of the Government, as requested in paragraph 14 of General Assembly resolution 50/120. The introduction of the United Nations development assistance frameworks by the directive of the Secretary-General of 17 March of 1997 is a step in that direction.

12. National execution

64. In its resolution 50/120, the General Assembly requested the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to undertake efforts, in the context of national execution and capacity-building, to enhance the absorptive capacity in developing countries, improve the common understanding of national execution and revise system-wide guidelines.

65. The status of implementation of national execution varies from country to country. A large number of resident coordinators have reported that there is a systematic policy in place for strengthening capacities for national execution. Major factors affecting the expansion of national execution include the level of executing capacities in the country, the need for related institutional development and the adequacy of national procedures.

66. National execution is diversely defined by various United Nations system organizations and bodies in their concrete operations. UNDP and to a lesser extent UNFPA have been directly and actively engaged in the expansion of national execution, involving technical agencies of the United Nations system mostly as cooperating or implementing agencies, when the Government desires to maintain their services. The UNICEF mode of national execution retains financial and technical control of the programme components, and uses national institutions as implementing bodies.

67. Although the General Assembly highlighted the role of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system in transferring and facilitating the necessary technical and substantive expertise to support the national execution

of United Nations-funded programme and projects, the role of cooperating arrangements with specialized agencies under national execution has to date been marginal on the whole. By and large, the rapid extension of national execution in most countries has resulted in reduced opportunities for United Nations technical agencies to contribute their technical expertise effectively through UNDP-funded programmes. Non-UNDP funded projects, executed by United Nations technical agencies, involve national institutions in their implementation and make increasing use of national personnel as project managers.

13. Monitoring and evaluation

68. Both the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/120, and the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/42, requested that evaluations and programme reviews of operational activities be undertaken jointly by the system, making the fullest possible use of national capacity. Although it is too early to draw firm conclusions, some joint evaluation work has taken place in 40 per cent of countries reported on. In addition, plans to conduct joint mid-term and end-of-cycle reviews of programmes should lead to significant savings in the cost of programme review and evaluation, permitting the resources available to cover programmes in greater depth.

69. Although no concerted move has yet been made by the system to set up the mechanisms to collect the essential baseline data necessary for a comprehensive impact evaluation of operational activities, there have been extensive efforts within JCGP to prepare a common country assessment that, once established, could provide basic data against which progress could be measured.

70. The focus of current monitoring and evaluation is by and large the programmes and the projects of the different United Nations entities, and joint monitoring and evaluation is limited. A more coordinated system-wide approach will be required as more collaborative programmes are carried out, particularly as follow-up to United Nations conferences. As part of the greater attention given to monitoring and evaluation by the United Nations system, CCPOQ has been taking a more systematic look at those issues.

Recommendation 14

71. The Council may wish to encourage further initiatives by the system towards more coherent and coordinated monitoring and evaluation of operational activities, including the establishment of baseline data for major programmes, and may wish to urge that that process be continued and extended to cover the support of headquarters to operational activities.

B. Regional and subregional development cooperation

72. At its 1995 triennial comprehensive policy review of the operational activities for development, the General Assembly considered for the first time in that context the regional dimension of operational activities for development. In paragraph 20 of its resolution 50/120, it requested the Secretary-General to consider ways of enhancing the coordination of subregional

and regional development activities of the United Nations system, promoting national ownership of those activities, and enhancing the role of the regional commissions. Those directives of the General Assembly are being pursued by the United Nations within the framework of CCPOQ. Since the Council decided to consider at the current session coordination at the regional and subregional levels (see Council resolution 1996/42, para. 11), some of the current issues are covered in the present report and in E/1997/65/Add.2.

Recommendation 15

73. The Council may wish to consider the extent to which the upcoming triennial comprehensive policy review in 1998 should address issues in the coordination of regional development activities of the United Nations system, as well as other issues arising from General Assembly resolution 50/120, including national ownership of regional activities and enhancing the role of regional commissions in those activities.

1. Common definitions

74. The importance of the regional dimension of operational activities is increasing: they currently constitute about 10 per cent of the total (i.e., approximately $500 million per annum). A review of current approaches to intercountry and regional programmes reveals a range of modalities at the programme and project levels, and there are still no agreed definitions and common statistics in that area. Coverage of regions and subregions varies among organizations, and over 100 offices operate without visible linkages; greater coordination would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of such activities.

2. Regional strategy note

75. The concept of a regional strategy note was advanced in the report of the Secretary-General for the 1995 triennial comprehensive policy review. Its basic premise of providing a common framework for channelling United Nations system resources to agreed priorities remains valid. A practical step forward may be to test the approach in one region and also in one or two subregions.

Recommendation 16

76. The Council may wish to consider whether the concept of a regional strategy note should be tested in one region and a few subregions. The evaluation of the testing phase could include an assessment of the regional strategy note's contribution to coordination at the regional level.

IV. IMPACT EVALUATION

77. The evaluation of the impact of operational activities for development mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/120 (para. 56) is under way. It is an integral part of the preparation of the 1998 triennial comprehensive policy review by the General Assembly. The overarching theme of

the evaluation will be capacity-building. Three topics will be examined: (a) capacity-building by the whole range of United Nations entities in a sample of countries; (b) capacity-building related to preparation for participation in and follow up to global conferences in a sample of countries; and (c) capacity-building at or by regional institutions. Other topics that are being considered and for which evaluation work may be undertaken include national capacity for aid coordination and management, and for response to the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome epidemic; gender in development issues; poverty alleviation and sustainable development; and follow-up to capacity 21.

78. The method employed will be to prepare case studies of the three selected topics of capacity-building. For each of the three categories, one initial case study is being undertaken to assess impact in a specific area of capacity-building. Following those three initial case studies, if additional resources are made available, a further two case studies will be undertaken on each topic, making a total of nine in all.

79. An independent group of experts is expected to be formed to review and comment on the evaluation at key points in the process. The group will be invited to contribute its views on the process at any time, and to provide a brief appraisal of the evaluation that will be reflected in the Secretary-General's report for the triennial policy review.

Time-frame

80. The United Nations system and a sample of 37 countries have been requested to provide data and analysis. The first three missions are due to begin in July, and the exercise should be completed no later than February 1998. The current level of extrabudgetary resources available for the exercises is about $250,000. A further $420,000 is required to allow missions for each of the three topics to examine two more countries or institutions.

Recommendation 17

81. The Council may wish to take note of the preparations for the impact evaluation made in response to paragraph 56 of General Assembly resolution 50/120.

Notes

[1] The Executive Committee is chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and is composed of the heads of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department for Development Support and Management Services and the Department for Policy Coordination on Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, and the regional commissions.

[2] For details, see E/1997/65/Add.3.

[3] For detailed assessment, see E/1997/65/Add.1.

[4] For detailed assessment, see E/1997/65/Add.2.